

# Baka language

**Baka** (also called *Be-bayaga*, *Be-bayaka*, and *Bibaya de L'est*) is a dialect cluster of Ubangian languages spoken by the Baka Pygmies of Cameroon and Gabon. The people are ethnically close to the Aka, the two together called the Mbenga (*Bambenga*), but the languages are not related, apart from some vocabulary dealing with the forest economy, which suggests the Aka may have shifted to Bantu, probably 15000 people have shifted.

Some 30% of Baka vocabulary is not Ubangian. Much of this concerns a specialised forest economy, such as words for edible plants, medicinal plants, and honey collecting, and has been posited as the remnant of an ancestral Pygmy language which has otherwise vanished.<sup>[3]</sup> However, apart from some words shared with the Aka, there is no evidence for a wider linguistic affiliation with any of the other Pygmy peoples.<sup>[4]</sup>

It is unclear if Gundi (Ngundi), Ganzi and Massa (Limassa), are mutually intelligible with Baka proper. Most Massa have shifted to Gundi, which is spoken by 9,000 people.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Ngombe tribe speaks Gundi. It may have been confused in the literature with the Ngombe population speaking the Bangandu language.

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## Phonology

### Consonants

| Baka                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Native to</b>       | Cameroon, Gabon; minor groups separate in the Central African Republic                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>       | Baka people                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Native speakers</b> | (70,000 cited 1988–2010) <sup>[1]</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Language family</b> | <div>Ubangian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sere–Mba<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ngbaka<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Western<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Baka</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div> |
| Language codes         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>ISO 639-3</b>       | Variously: <div>bkc – Baka</div> <div>gdi – Gundi (Ngundi)</div> <div>gnz – Ganzi</div> <div>bme – Massa (Limassa)</div>                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Glottolog</b>       | baka1271 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/baka1271</span> ) <sup>[2]</sup>                                                                                                                                                         |

|                    |              | <u>Bilabial</u> | <u>Alveolar</u>  | <u>Palatal</u> | <u>Velar</u>   | <u>Labio-velar</u> |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| <u>Plosive</u>     | plain        | p               | t                |                | k              | kp̥                |
|                    | voiced       | b               | d                |                | g              | gb̥                |
|                    | prenasalized | <sup>m</sup> b  | <sup>n</sup> d   |                | <sup>ŋ</sup> g | <sup>ŋ</sup> gb̥   |
| <u>Fricative</u>   | plain        | ɸ               | s                |                |                |                    |
|                    | voiced       | β               |                  |                |                |                    |
| <u>Affricate</u>   | voiced       |                 | dz̥              |                |                |                    |
|                    | prenasalized |                 | <sup>n</sup> dz̥ |                |                |                    |
| <u>Lateral</u>     |              |                 | l                |                |                |                    |
| <u>Nasal</u>       |              | m               | n                | ɲ              |                |                    |
| <u>Approximant</u> |              |                 |                  | j              |                | w                  |

## Vowels

|                  | <u>Front</u> | <u>Back</u> |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|
| <u>Close</u>     | i            | u           |
| <u>Close-mid</u> | e            | o           |
| <u>Open-mid</u>  | ɛ            | ɔ           |
| <u>Open</u>      |              | a           |

[5]

## References

1. Baka (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/bkc/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)  
Gundi (Ngundi) (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/gdi/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)  
Ganzi (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/gnz/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)  
Massa (Limassa) (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/bme/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Baka–Gundi" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/baka1271>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Serge Bahuchet, 1993, *History of the inhabitants of the central African rain forest: perspectives from comparative linguistics*. In C.M. Hladik, ed., *Tropical forests, people, and food: Biocultural interactions and applications to development*. Paris: Unesco/Parthenon.
4. Blench (in press) (<http://www.rogerblench.info/Genetics/SAFA%202004%20genetics%20paper.pdf>)
5. Paulin, Pascale (2010). *Les Baka du Gabon dans une dynamique de transformations culturelles*.

## External links

- [Baka Pygmies \(http://www.pygmies.org/baka/\)](http://www.pygmies.org/baka/) Culture and photos, with soundscapes of Baka camps in the rainforest
  - [Baka Forest People \(http://www.baka.co.uk/baka/\)](http://www.baka.co.uk/baka/) Information, videos, music and photos of the Baka from Moloundou region of Cameroon.
  - [Baka: A Highly Endangered Language of Northern Cameroun \(http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Afroasiatic/Chadic/Central/Baka/Baka%20wordlist%20Cameroun%2009.pdf\)](http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Afroasiatic/Chadic/Central/Baka/Baka%20wordlist%20Cameroun%2009.pdf) Baka information and word list
  - ELAR collection: [A documentation of the remnant Baka-Gundi language Limassa \(https://elar.s.oas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1035153\)](https://elar.s.oas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1035153) deposited by Benedikt Winkhart
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